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SUBJECT: CODEL SMITH MALAYSIA MEETING REPORT

Summary

¶1. (U) Congressman Adam Smith, accompanied by staff of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Terrorism, Unconventional Threats and Capabilities, visited Malaysia January 6-8, 2008 as part of a regional tour. The Congressman met with Malaysian NSC Secretary YBhg. Dato' Muhammad Hatta Bin Abd. Aziz, Internal Security Minister Deputy Director General YBhg. Datuk Ahmad Fuad bin Ab. Aziz, and Defense Intelligence Staff Directorate Director General LTG Dato' Mohd Salleh bin Hj Ismail. In each of his meetings, Congressman Smith expressed his eagerness to learn how the United States could improve its relationship with the Muslim world. He also solicited his interlocutors' assessment of the most important threats faced by Malaysia. End Summary.

Internal Security

¶2. (SBU/FOUO) Malaysian NSC Secretary Hatta described the NSC's role not as operational, but as coordinating GOM policy on maritime, border and cyber-security as well as disaster management. Hatta pointed to weak disaster preparedness and terrorism in the tri-border region as his greatest security concerns. Regarding the latter, Hatta highlighted the effectiveness of international information sharing along with the use of Malaysia's Internal Security Act (ISA) to detain as well as to rehabilitate suspects. Hatta acknowledged that lawyers on both sides were arguing over the legitimacy of the ISA, particularly given human rights concerns stemming from the ISA security screening process.

¶3. (SBU/FOUO) Internal Security Ministry Deputy Secretary General Fuad briefed Congressman Smith on the recent history of his Ministry and offered an overview of the international conventions that it was charged to enforce. Fuad, like Hatta, praised the good working relationship between the police and U.S. interlocutors. The police, he noted, were the lead agency in Malaysia's counterterrorism efforts. Of a total of 130 terrorist suspects they have detained under ISA, 46 suspects remain in detention since 2001. When asked about the GOM's not having prosecuted any suspects, despite the new, tougher criminal statutes now on the books, Fuad replied that before a case is brought to public trial, police and prosecutors will work on "test cases." Finally, Fuad signaled the relevance of border committee meetings in strengthening bilateral cooperation between Malaysia and its tri-border neighbors, the Philippines and Indonesia.

Southern Thailand, Southern Philippines

¶4. (SBU/FOUO) NSC Hatta said of the Southern Thai situation that he believed the fundamental question involved recognition and resolution of the local grievances of ethnic and religious minority Malay Muslims. Hatta cited existing military-to-military contact between Malaysia and Thailand and the GOM's continuing engagement with the Thai government. Hatta suggested it would be useful to develop partnerships with regional players in order to help stem illegal immigration in the plantation and restaurant sectors.

¶5. (SBU/FOUO) Military Intelligence DG LTG Salleh mentioned that his Military Intelligence Directorate was looking at ways to become more involved in counterterrorism, characterizing Malaysia as being "in the middle of an active area." He sounded a more pessimistic note, pointing to on-going corruption, mistreatment and excessive use of force by the Thai military in the South. Salleh drew parallels between Aceh, Southern Thailand, and the Southern Philippines. He argued that the situations require "removing the basis for resistance," by reducing disparities in wealth and bringing education, development and marketable skills to the aggrieved local population. Salleh further said of the Southern Philippines that while working level contacts were good, the policy level was "stuck," adding that "leaders were not serious; were pulling out."

Meeting Malaysian Opinion Leaders and Embassy Staff

¶6. (SBU) Prior to meeting GOM officials Codel Smith held extensive consultations with all Embassy offices involved in counterterrorism efforts. Following the day's meetings, the Ambassador hosted a dinner in the Congressman's honor, to meet socially with Malaysian opinion leaders, Parliamentarians and other officials. Before departing Malaysia, the Codel briefly toured the world's tallest twin towers, the Petronas Towers, as well as one of Kuala Lumpur's oldest mosques, Masjid Jamek.

Embassy Comment

¶7. (SBU/FOUO) Congressman Smith's visit provided Malaysian authorities with an important opportunity to hear a distinct Washington perspective and to share their views on vital security issues with a particularly receptive interlocutor. It also afforded post the chance to underscore for the Codel the value of robust engagement with our interlocutors in this strategically important Muslim-majority nation. End Comment.

¶8. (U) Congressman Smith has approved this message.

KEITH